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July 17, 1956  
Sanford, N.C.

Dear Dr. Scott,

I hope that you can still use my term paper in the Christian Sun. I should have sent it sooner but, I did not seem to have a chance. Please read it and feel free to return it without using it if you think that it is not accurate enough. I had to leave out a lot so that the paper would be the required length.

I would like to thank you for your help. I earned an excellent grade on it and gained a great deal of knowledge about our denomination.

Sincerely,  
Patricia Proctor

A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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PATRICIA PROCTOR  
PERIOD 3



## A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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  - C. The Separatists moved to New England to preserve their English character.
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John Eliot who was the first missionary to the Indians.
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- VII. Congregational Churches achieved expansion in the South after the Civil War. 6
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- A. James O'Kelly founded the Christian Movement in North Carolina.
  - B. Abner Jones founded a Christian Church in New England.
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- IX. A Merger of the Congregational and Christian Churches took place. 7
- As a result the General Council was formed.
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## A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

One of the multifarious religious sects which evolved as a result of the Reformation was the Separatist Movement. It was instituted by a group of former Anglicans, led by Robert Browne. The Anglican Church had been established by Henry the Eighth primarily for his own convenience. Some of the English people soon grew dissatisfied with the Established Church of England; therefore, they separated from it in favor of a religion that was not state controlled.

The first meeting of the Separatists was held in Norwich, England about 1581. But, it was not safe to belong to any church other than the Anglican in England. So the separatists migrated to Holland, which was the only enlightened European country that allowed freedom of worship and conscience. When they first decided to move to Holland in 1609, the authorities in England who perpetually harassed them would not let them leave. Finally, however, after many tribulations, they left the country. Through these ordeals the group was led by John Robinson, their minister, and William Brewster, a layman. In Leyden, Holland the Separatists were able to practice their religion without persecution. For twelve years they lived there, happily engaged in sundry jobs which trained them well to become colonists in America. Though they were living peaceably there, they realized that soon their children would cease to be English and so, in an effort to prevent that, the Pilgrims decided to move once again--this time to the New World.







After much exploration, the colonists found a group of English merchants who would sponsor them. At last, in 1620, one-hundred and two colonists sailed from Plymouth, England on the Mayflower.

Following two months at sea, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. The brave band was greeted by the bleak, desolate, and cold New England coast. In an effort to contrive some kind of plans for self-government, the Mayflower Compact was drawn up on board ship.

Having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our King and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia. Do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another; covenant, and combine our selves together into a civil body of politics; for our better ordering, and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, Acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, the Leyden Church and the newly founded Plymouth Church were one and the same under John Robinson, minister. Due to his untimely death, Robinson never followed his church members to the New World. Without a pastor the progress of the church was seriously hampered. Fortunately, William Brewster, a wise layman, was a member of the group. Through his diplomacy, he was able to keep the church together and to help it to grow and prosper.

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1 Gaius Glenn Atkins, An Adventure In Liberty, the Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1950, p.5



Even without a pastor, the Plymouth group called themselves a church. Thus, American Congregationalism had its inception.

The Pilgrims left a record of much to be proud of. The Indians received fairer treatment from them than from another colony.

With the coming of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to New England in 1629, the second Congregational Church was established. The two colonies--Plymouth and Salem--came in touch with each other through Dr. Samuel Fuller, a deacon in the Plymouth Church and only physician in the New World.

During the period from 1630 to 1648 the Congregational way suffered a veritable setback, for the immigrants from England during this period were predominantly Presbyterian.

New England had two champions during this period--Thomas Hooker and John Cotton. When it became evident that Presbyterianism and Congregationalism were growing farther and farther apart, these two men wrote documents in favor of freedom for each church. These writings resulted in the meeting of the Cambridge Synod in 1648 to try to reconcile the two beliefs. The Synod drew up a "constitution" for the churches, called the Platform of Church Discipline. It set up rules concerning the officers of the church, the election of church officers and the admission of members into the church, to name a few of the issues on which the Synod took a stand. One of these which is in actual practice in the Congregational Christian Church today is:





The Church derives its life from its faith in God, as He is revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit to its members. "They stand to Christ as a body unto the head, being united unto him by the spirit of God, and faith in their hearts."<sup>2</sup>

If the principles of the Platform had lasted for the succeeding one hundred years, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism would probably have become one denomination.

As we have seen, the growth of the Separatists into a denomination was gradual. For a name, Congregational was a natural. Henry Jacob first used the word with a capital letter in reference to the group. Congregationalists today think of themselves as churches rather than a church.

When the church, its doctrines and its members had become more or less stable, the church leaders were faced with the problem of providing education for their ministers. The first institutions of higher learning were established by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the seventeenth century. These colleges were Harvard and Yale. The entire Board of Governors of Harvard College were loyal members of the Congregational Church. They, along with the faculty, who were Congregationalists too, tried to carry into the college some of the same ideals which had been instilled in them by the church. Because of these factors, Harvard has often been called a Congregationally founded school, but, actually it was founded by the Commonwealth. Through the years of its service, the Congregational Church has sponsored

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2 The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline, The General Council of the Congregational Christian Church, New York, 1948, P. 4



many different kinds of educational facilities. Among them are permanent institutions for the education of girls and schools for Indians.

The treatment which the Indians received from the colonists is indeed a shameful story. But, like most things, even this had a bright side. John Eliot was the first missionary sent to the Indians. Eliot spent several years learning the Indian language. He translated both the Old and New Testaments into the Indian tongue. And his Catechism was the first book ever printed in the Indian language.

Following the Revolutionary War, a new epoch began in the history of the Congregational Christian Churches. Before the war America had covered only the Atlantic coast, but afterwards, people began the great Western Migration. Along with the people, the church spread westward, too. A congregational pastor, Manasseh Cutler, was very influential in drawing up the Northwest Territory Ordinance. During the early years of the migration westward, the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches worked together in aiding new churches in the west to become permanently established.

Congregationalists were not only concerned with America, but the entire world. Samuel J. Mills devoted his life to missionary work. Being devoutly religious, he organized a prayer group while he was in college. Their meeting place was a maple grove near their college. One August they were driven to a haystack for shelter by a thunderstorm. It was there that the group decided to spread the gospel to Asia.



"The society was called 'the Brethren' and their purpose was to effect...a mission or missions to the heathen."<sup>3</sup> At last the group was able to convince some people in their cause and thus gained sponsors for their group. In September of 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was organized and the Brethren were their first missionaries.

The American Board was also supported by the Presbyterian Church, but the rise of denominationalism soon changed this. Thus people in foreign lands were subjected to something which held absolutely no meaning for them--denominational divisions. Finally, the American Board was returned to the Congregational Churches, but, even today, it is non-denominational.

With the nineteenth century came the rise of the Unitarians. The strict principles of Calvinism was quite prominent in the older Congregational Churches. At last these theological differences became so prominent that they resulted in the permanent--though not formal--separation of many of our most important churches. This rift may be dated from William Ellery Channing's sermon in 1819 on "Unitarian Christianity".

At the termination of the Civil War, the American Missionary Association, which had been active in the South throughout the war, set up "Contraband Schools". Its schools were by no means wealthy, but they were filling a great void. In 1865 the Congregational Church became connected with the Association

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<sup>3</sup> Mervin M. Deems and Frederick L. Fagley, Historical Sketches of the Congregational Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 1953, p. 9



through its missionary work. Henceforth, their relations became increasingly intimate.

Congregationalism's growth was slow because it lacked national consciousness. But, because of this and the fact that it was located almost wholly north of the Mason-Dixon line, it emerged from the war undivided.

There were three movements for individual freedom in government. They were known as Christian Churches. James O'Kelley, a former Methodist, sponsored the first movement of the new denomination. His work began in Virginia and was concentrated there and in the neighboring state of North Carolina.

A second movement sprang up in Vermont when Abner Jones left the Baptist Church. Though not in opposition to the Baptist Church, Jones' church believed in expression of individual rights in matters of doctrine.

Kentucky was the site of the third in the series of Christian movements. This group, under the leadership of Barton W. Stone, believed in the right of individuals to follow the teachings of the Bible.

It was inevitable that these two movements--Congregational and Christian--should join together. The merger was officially transacted in Seattle Washington in 1931. With the merger evolved the General Council, which does not have the power to compel the churches to execute its wishes; but it can counsel with and guide the individual church on the right road.





There are eight things in which the Congregational Christian Church believes though it has no stated doctrine. They are as follows:

1. We Believe in God the Father.
2. We Believe in Jesus Christ.
3. We Believe in the Holy Spirit.
4. We Believe the Holy Bible is a Sufficient Rule of Faith and Practice.
5. We Believe the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.
6. We Believe it to be the Mission of the Church of Christ to Proclaim the Gospel to all Mankind.
7. We Believe in the Union of all the Followers of Christ.
8. We Look with Faith for the Triumph of Righteousness and the Life Everlasting.<sup>4</sup>

As we reflect upon this history and the spirit of our ancestors, the words of Leonard Bacon's hymn are brought to mind:

O God, beneath thy guiding hand  
 Our exiled fathers crossed the sea;  
 And when they trod the wintry strand,  
 With Prayer and Psalm they worshipped Thee.

And here Thy Name, O God of love,  
 Their children's children shall adore,  
 Till these eternal hills remove,  
 And Spring adorns the earth no more.

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<sup>4</sup> The Congregational Christian Churches of the South  
 p. 3 and 4



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